DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 576 EA 028 607

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TITLE School Principals: Their Roles and Preparation.
PUB DATE 1997-03-00
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Creating the Quality School (Oklahoma City, OK, March 20-22, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Job Satisfaction; *Principals; *Quality of Working Life; School Administration

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a survey of 500 elementary, middle, and senior high school principals. The survey focused on four areas of the principalship: (1) principals' perceived roles as building administrators; (2) time spent in those roles; (3) graduate school preparation for the roles; and (4) levels of job satisfaction. Findings indicate that the typical respondent spent 46-60 hours per week dealing with school-related activities, primarily "admininistrivia." Principals also reported spending a significant amount of time supervising students and faculty, attending meetings, and dealing with discipline situations. However, the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with their work, colleagues, responsibilities, and supervisors. They spent little time in the role of instructional leaders for which graduate programs had prepared them. Graduate schools did provide training in communication, leadership, public-relations, and decision-making skills; however, principals seemed to lack preparation in class scheduling and discipline. Finally, respondents were least satisfied with their salary levels. A copy of the questionnaire is included. (LMI)

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ED 411 576

School Principals: Their Roles and Preparation

by

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A paper presented at the Sixth National Conference on Creating the Quality School, March 20-22, 1997, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

EA028607

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ABSTRACT

A survey of 500 elementary, middle, and senior high school principals focused on four major areas of the principalship. The respondents were asked to describe: 1) their perceived roles as building administrators; 2) time spent in those roles; 3) graduate school preparation for the roles; and 4) levels of job satisfaction. Results of the study, a description of the typical respondent, and differences among the three groups of principals are included in this paper.

School Principals: Their Roles and Preparation

What roles do principals perceive themselves as filling? How much time do they spend in those roles? Are they prepared to do their jobs? How happy are they in their work as building principals? Those are four of the major questions asked in this study and answered in this paper.

Typical Respondent

The answers to questions two through seven in the survey (see Appendix A) indicate the typical respondent in this study. The questionnaire was distributed to five hundred elementary, middle, and senior high school principals. The typical respondent was a male between the ages of 41 and 50 years of age, working in a building with an enrollment of more than 550 students. He is relatively new in his current position with less than three years experience, but he does have a total of between four and eight years of experience as an administrator. Differences among the three groups are identified as 1) Elementary principals were mostly female; 2) Senior high principals had served longer in their current position (4 to 8 years); and 3) Senior high principals had spent more years in the principalship (9 to 14 years).

Role Perceptions

Question #28 offered five choices regarding how the principals spent the majority of their time. More than two-thirds (68%) considered themselves as general managers, while almost one-fourth (22%) perceived themselves to be instructional leaders. The remainder were divided rather evenly among the other three choices of principal teacher, curriculum leader, and professional/scientific manager.

Time Allocations

The typical principal in this study spends between ten and twelve hours per day and between forty-six and sixty hours per week dealing with school related activities. The majority of their time is taken by "administrivia", defined here as routine duties, paperwork, and phone calls. Another significant amount of time is spent in the supervision of students and faculty, attending meetings, and dealing with discipline situations. Relatively small amounts of time (less than five hours per week) are devoted to curriculum development, teacher evaluations, scheduling, and meeting with parents in the district. It is not surprising, then, that these principals view themselves as general managers, rather than instructional leaders.

Job Satisfaction

The subjects in this study were asked to indicate their levels of job satisfaction in eight different areas in questions eight through fifteen (See Appendix A). These categories are 1) Colleagues/Co-workers; 2) The job; 3) Responsibility; 4) Opportunity for promotion; 5) Pay; 6) Working conditions; 7) Fringe benefits; and 8) Your supervisor.

The respondents indicated that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their colleagues, their job, level of responsibility, working conditions, and supervisor. Lower levels of satifaction were recorded in their opportunity for advancement and fringe benefits, while pay ranked the lowest on the scale for satisfaction. There were no significant differences among the three groups.

Preparation for Roles

Items 29 through 40 on the questionnaire (Appendix A) referred to graduate school preparation for the roles that principals assume. Overall, potential administrators are being well prepared for their future roles as building principals. The subjects reported having received excellent or good preparation in instructional leadership. Other areas receiving relatively high marks include supervisor of faculty and staff as it pertains to evaluation, public relations, communication, budgeting, and decision-making. Categories of concern include building management, discipline, interpersonal

relationships, and class scheduling. More than 40% of the principals indicated that they had received little preparation in these areas, while 42% reported having received little or no preparation in class scheduling. It seems crucial that graduate schools need to focus more attention and devote more time to these kinds of programs, since the principals spend significant amounts of time on the job dealing with issues requiring these preparations.

Conclusions

While building principals spend huge amounts of time on the job as general managers, they still seem satisfied with their work, colleagues, reponsibilities, and supervisors. Even though they are being prepared by graduate programs as instructional leaders, the principals are spending little time in that role. Some of the tools necessary for success, such as communication, leadership, public relations, and decision-making, are being delivered by graduate schools. On the other hand, items such as class scheduling and discipline, which also are necessary for success, seem to be missing from their preparation.

APPENDIX A

Please mark your responses on the enclosed computer card, fold in half, and place in the return envelope.

1.Please indicate in which region of the state your school is located.

A. Northwest
B. Northeast
C. Central
D. Southwest
E. Southeast

2. How would you describe the grade span of the building to which you are assigned?

A. Elementary (1-6)
B. Middle school (5-8)
C. Jr.-Sr. high school (7-12)
D. Senior high (9-12)
E. Other

3. How many years have you spent in your current assignment?

A. 0 - 3
B. 4 - 8
C. 9 - 14
D. 15 - 20
E. 21 or more

4. How many years have you spent as a principal?

A. 0 - 3
B. 4 - 8
C. 9 - 14
D. 15 - 20
E. 21 or more

5. Please identify your gender.

A. Male
B. Female

6. What is your age?

A. 21 - 25
B. 26 - 30
C. 31 - 40
D. 41 - 50
E. 51 or older

7. What is the enrollment in your building?

A. Fewer than 150 students
B. 151 - 250 students
C. 251 - 400 students
D. 401 - 550 students
E. 551 or more students

Please use the below scale to indicate your level of satisfaction with the below factors

A. Very satisfied
B. Satisfied
C. Neutral
D. Dissatisfied
E. Very dissatisfied

8. Colleagues/Co-workers
9. The job you currently hold
10. Level of responsibility
11. Opportunity for promotion/advancement
12. Pay
13. Working conditions
14. Fringe benefits
15. Your supervisor

16. How many hours per ***day*** do you typically spend in school-related activities? (before school, during the school day, and after school)

A. 0 - 3 hours
B. 4 - 6 hours
C. 7 - 9 hours
D. 10 - 12 hours
E. 13 or more hours

17. How many hours per ***week*** do you typically spend in school-related activities? (before school, during the school day, and after school)

A. 0 - 15 hours
B. 16 - 30 hours
C. 31 - 45 hours
D. 46 - 60 hours
E. 61 or more hours

Please estimate the number of hours you spend in a typical week in the below activities, using the following scale.

A. Less than 1 hour
B. 1 - 5 hours
C. 6 - 10 hours
D. 11 - 20 hours
E. 21 or more hours

18. Discipline
19. Teacher observations/evaluations
20. Curriculum development
21. Supervising non-certified staff
22. Supervising faculty
23. Meeting with patrons/parents
24. "Administrivia" (routine duties, paperwork, phone calls, etc.)
25. Supervising students
26. Scheduling
27. Meetings

28. Please classify how you spend most of your time at school.

A. As an instructional leader
B. As a general manager
C. As a principal teacher (part-time teaching duties)
D. As a curriculum leader
E. As a professional/scientific manager

Please indicate below how much preparation your graduate program offered you in the below areas, using the following scale.

A. Excellent preparation
B. Good preparation
C. Little preparation
D. Very little preparation
E. No preparation

29. Instructional leadership
30. Supervisor of faculty/evaluation
31. Supervisor of staff/evaluation
32. Building manager
33. Disciplinarian
34. Public relations
35. Curriculum development
36. Interpersonal relationships
37. Communication
38. Class scheduling
39. Budgeting/finance
40. Decision-making/problem-solving

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Please include your name and address if you wish to receive a summary of the results.